

Press Conference - 6/10/2015
Presentation of the Nemitsas Prize 2015 in Visual Arts

Christodoulos Panayiotou was born in Limassol in 1978. He lives and works in Limassol, Paris and Berlin.

The International Experts Committee for the award of the Nemitsas Prize 2015 in Visual Arts was presented this year with more than forty recommendations, either at the submission of the artists themselves or on recommendation by art historians and exhibit curators. The Experts Committee consisted of Chairperson Marie-Laure Bernadac, Exhibition Curator at the Picasso Museum and the Pompidou Centre and previously Curator in Charge and Special Advisor on Contemporary Arts at the Louvre Museum in Paris. Chantal Béret, Curator at the Pompidou Centre, Anaël Pigeat, art critic and Editor in Chief of Art Press magazine, Andri Michael, Professor of History of Contemporary Art at the Université de Picardie, Jules Verne, France and Sarah Wilson, art historian at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. The Committee, having noted the international career of young Cypriot artists and their recognition by major museums and internationally renowned figures, and after careful examination of all the artworks submitted, *unanimously* decided to award the first prize to Christodoulos Panayiotou, basing their decision on purely artistic criteria. His candidacy was nominated by Yiannis Toumazis, Director of the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre (NiMAC), Chairman of the Board of the Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC) and Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, Fine and Applied Arts of Frederick University.

Christodoulos Panayiotou's presence on the international scene is not only significant but also amazing. He is one of the few artists from Cyprus, if not the only one, who has such an intense activity and broad recognition worldwide.



The oeuvre of Christodoulos Panayiotou has been featured in a number of solo exhibitions, held at prestigious museums and art centres in Cyprus and abroad. Among others, some of the most recent ones are: 2015 Nicosia, Cyprus (Point Centre for Contemporary Art), 2014 Hong Kong, China (Spring), 2013 Kitakyushu, Japan (Centre of Contemporary Art), Stockholm, Sweden (Moderna Museet), Luxemburg (Casino Luxemburg) and Graz, Austria (Camera Austria), 2012 St. Louis, U.S.A. (Museum of Contemporary Art), 2011 Leipzig, Germany (Museum of Contemporary Art), 2010 Zurich, Switzerland (Kunsthalle), 2009 Constantinople, Turkey (Rodeo Gallery), 2008 Madrid, Spain (Arco), 2006 Oxford, United Kingdom (Museum of Modern Art) and many more other places.

The artist has participated in many international biennials, among which Berlin Biennale (2014), Liverpool Biennale (2012), the very important Documenta 13 (Kassel, Germany 2012), [this is the first time in the history of this significant art event in which two Cypriot artists,

Christodoulos Panayiotou and Haris Epaminonda, participated], Taipei Biennial, Taiwan, and Busan Biennial, Korea (2008), with impressive works, which show how well Cyprus was represented at an international level with the artist's works. This year the artist has been selected to represent the Republic of Cyprus at the Biennale of Venice with his installation *Two Days After Forever*, which encapsulates in a simple but critical way his key philosophical and aesthetic vision and understanding of things and art.

Christodoulos Panayiotou's participations in group exhibitions are not only numerous but many of them were organised by curators of international standing – for example, by the prominent curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, who not only showed keen interest in the work of the artist but also supported him from the early stages of his career. These exhibitions were held at important exhibition venues in Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Israel, England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain and elsewhere, as well as in countries in America and Asia. The exhibition of works by Christodoulos Panayiotou at the Marcel Duchamp Gallery at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, next to Duchamp's mythical masterpiece *Nu descendant un escalier No. 1* (*Nude descending a staircase No. 1* (1911), is particularly moving for all of us and denotes the international recognition of Panayiotou's oeuvre. His works can be found in significant public and private collections worldwide.

At this point it should be noted that the artist participated in a number of artist-in-residence programs in many countries including: Caparcete, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2011), IASPIS, Stockholm, Sweden (2009), Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany (2008), Exposito, Naples, Italy (2007), CPH AIR, Copenhagen, Denmark (2007), Platform-Garanti Center of Contemporary Art, Constantinople, Turkey (2006), and KODRA, Thessaloniki, Greece (2005).

The artist, whom we are honouring today with the Nemitsas Prize 2015 in Visual Arts, has been a recipient in the past of the following prizes: The Future Of Europe Prize, Museum of Contemporary Art, Leipzig, Germany (2011), Undo Foundation Award-Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany (2008), DESTE Prize, DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece (2005) and the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture Dance Prize for the performance Evergreen (with Lia Haraki).

The theoretical background of references in the work of Christodoulos Panayiotou has existed since his first studies – Performance and Performing Arts (in Lyon, France) and Anthropology (in London). The convergence of these two fields has given a special dimension and dynamic to the work of the artist all these years.

Among the major and key issues that concern the artist are those related to history and the sense of identity and memory. Although the artist's quests are not limited to the local level, Cyprus, from where he embarks, has given him a fertile ground for issues that concern artists and theorists worldwide, such as challenging the prevailing historical narratives and the examination of the particular ways with which the people of a country, through archives and archaeological finds, shape their history.

Christodoulos Panayiotou indulges in archives and retrieves images that highlight, in a fragmented albeit crucial way, unique features of the society of Cyprus. For example, the artist sifted through archival images of the carnival in the Municipality of Limassol archives, discovering a wealth of images, which he presents in a simple and unbiased slide projection. Before the visitor's eyes unfolds a comment on the Cypriot society, which chooses traditional masquerades based on the animated heroes of Disney in order to hide the tragedy that has been plaguing it for decades. Furthermore, apart from the political situation with its many unresolved problems, Panayiotou critically deals with the stereotypes of a society that has lost its orientation and sways with self-determination issues, examining in depth the mechanisms of creation of ideology and the "construction" of identity.

Moreover, with his large-scale floor installation *Days and Ages* (2013), presented in an exhibition with the same title at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and following a thorough research in the archives of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition, the artist deals with colonialism and symbolic domination by exploring the ancient and more recent history of colonized Cyprus, as well as by researching the methods of archaeological research. The archaeological missions, which conducted wide-ranging excavations in Cyprus from the 19th until the mid-20th century, are also carriers of messages of colonialist attitudes in countries with rich archaeological interest. The intentional detachment with which the artist presents archive material and images make their “dramatic” character even more intense, such as, for example, the photos with the dozens of crates with Cypriot antiquities at the harbour of Kyrenia awaiting to be shipped to Sweden in 1931.

His 2008 artwork, a pile of tiny pieces of paper that is nothing more than shredded Cypriot pounds, deals with the current reality in Cyprus and one of the strongest symbols of colonialism. The artist managed to secure, before they were lost forever, all the Cyprus pound banknotes that were withdrawn from circulation after the Cypriot national currency was replaced by the euro. With the shredding of the banknotes, the artist manages to transform a symbol associated with colonisation into an “amorphous” sculpture. The work also indirectly raises the concept of “value”, that of articles, of money and ultimately that of art. The artwork was recently purchased by the Pompidou Centre in France.

In the series of artworks with shoes, the artist chooses once again to deal in an inspired way with the concept of “value”, whether material or sentimental. He orders these shoes to be made-to-measure in the traditional way with leather and leatherette from already existing objects – like women’s bags and purses belonging to friends and acquaintances. Panayiotou raises a comment on contemporary sculpture and its materials, on making such artworks and their use, on converting the old into something new.



Installation view, 8th Berlin Biennale, 2014, Photo: Anders Sune Berg

The use and exploitation of primary materials, with the particular value they carry for the history of Cyprus, are employed by the artist in the makeshift “taps” made of copper – a material that comes from the island’s largest copper mine with special economic importance from ancient times to date.

In Panayiotou’s work there is a node of multiple references. Moreover, the renewal of ancient techniques, which are entwined with the history of a place, characterises the series of works of ceramic floors. Presented in both Documenta 13 (2012) and the Cyprus Pavilion at the Biennale of Venice this year, these ceramic floors are made using the traditional making technique and are incorporated into the exhibition space in such a way as to form part of building’s original structure.



Days and Ages, Installation view, ModernaMuseet, 2014, Photo: ModernaMuseet / ÅsaLundén

Of particular interest is the relationship of the artist’s oeuvre with the architectural and theatrical environment, an element that gives each one of his works a character of performance. At the Biennale of Venice, for example, a performance takes place on the artwork-ceramic floor by a professional dancer, marking in this way the space as a theatre stage which is at the same time a theatre of life.



And, Installation view, Casino Luxembourg, 2013, Photo: Andres Lejona

With the help of complex and multi-level signalling, the visitor moves through spaces of meditation and reflection, formulating such questions as what is art? How does this artwork work? Why the floor? Should we walk on it or not?

Moreover, the soil and water, of which his ceramics are made, are materials that are unquestionably connected with history and the choices made by the people at a given historical moment. In Documenta 13, the artist used saltwater from the Mediterranean and for his installation at the Biennale of Venice this year soil coming from archaeological excavations.

All these invite us to consider questions, such as what do we allow to be forgotten? What do we insist on remembering? Thus, the cognitive quest triggered by Christodoulos Panayiotou's work increases the aesthetic enjoyment and reflection on key existential issues with which both the artist and the modern man, as well as the entire nation, are faced.

For all these reasons, the committee is absolutely convinced that Christodoulos Panayiotou should deservedly be awarded the Nemitsas Prize 2015 for his internationally recognized, wide-ranging achievements in visual arts. It also acknowledges that the particular choice honours the institution of the Nemitsas Prizes, which have been awarded to highly respected and internationally acclaimed scientists and artists.

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